



## **Assembly and Executive Review Committee**

**(AERC)**

### **End of Session Report**

**1 September 2013 to 31 August 2014**

#### **Powers**

The Assembly and Executive Review Committee is a Standing Committee established in accordance with Section 29A and 29B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 59 which states:

- “(1) There shall be a standing committee of the Assembly to be known as the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.
- (2) The committee may -
- (a) exercise the power in section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998;
  - (b) report from time to time to the Assembly and the Executive Committee.
- (3) The committee shall consider -
- (a) such matters relating to the operation of the provisions of Parts 3 and 4 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 as enable it to make the report referred to in section 29A(3) of that Act; and
  - (b) such other matters relating to the functioning of the Assembly or the Executive Committee as may be referred to it by the Assembly.”

#### **Membership**

The Committee has eleven members including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson with a quorum of five. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

Stephen Moutray (Chairperson)

Pat Sheehan (Deputy Chairperson)

Alex Attwood<sup>1</sup>

Roy Beggs

Paula Bradley<sup>2</sup>

Gregory Campbell

Paul Givan

Trevor Lunn<sup>3</sup>

Raymond McCartney

Seán Rogers

Caitríona Ruane

## **Key Activities**

### **Review of Petitions of Concern**

On the 14 January 2014, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee agreed the Terms of Reference for its Review of Petitions of Concern which were:

- Provisions for voting on an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity and Equality Requirements prior to the vote on a Petition of Concern.
- The possibility of restricting the use of Petitions of Concern to certain key areas, and mechanisms that might facilitate this
- Whether the current threshold of 30 signatures required for a Petition of Concern should be adjusted.
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- Whether the Petitions of Concern mechanism should be replaced with an alternative mechanism, such as a weighted-majority vote.

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<sup>1</sup> With effect from 4 September 2013 Mr Conall McDevitt resigned as a Member; with effect from 7 October 2013 Mr Alex Attwood replaced Mr Conall McDevitt

<sup>2</sup> With effect from 3 February 2014 Ms Paula Bradley replaced Mr Simon Hamilton

<sup>3</sup> With effect from 1 October 2013 Mr Trevor Lunn replaced Mr Stewart Dickson

## **Current Review – Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly**

- On 25 March 2014 the Committee engaged with the Political Parties of the Assembly to identify their views on priority issues for future Reviews by AERC.
- On 6 May 2014 the Committee agreed its next Review would be *Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly*.
- The Terms of Reference for this Review were agreed on 24 June 2014, including the 'Call for Evidence' paper which was issued on the 7 July 2014.

## **Key Outputs**

### **Review of Petitions of Concern**

- The Report on the Review of Petitions of Concern Report was published on 25 March 2014. The Report set out six conclusions and highlights that although the Committee did not achieve consensus for most of its conclusions on the complex subject of Petitions of Concern, the Report sets out in some detail the policy options for the change considered, together with the individual Party positions on specific options. The Report provides valuable information for the Assembly to reach a way forward on this matter.
- The Report was debated in the Assembly on Monday 7 April 2014.

### **Review of Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly**

- As part of the scoping stage of its current Review the Committee visited the National Assembly for Wales from the 4-5 June 2014 to explore the Initiatives implemented by the Presiding Officer to encourage more women into public life for the 2016 elections.
- On the 24 June 2014 The Committee agreed the Terms of Reference on the for its Review of *Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly*
- The Committee agreed a 'Call for Evidence' paper to be circulated to key stakeholders, including Political Parties, and 3 local newspapers on 7 July 2014.

## Key Achievements

- The Review of Petitions of Concern Report published on 25 March 2014.
- <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/2016-2017/assembly-and-executive-review/Session-2011-2016/review-of-petitions-of-concern/>
- Visit to Wales to explore the Initiatives to increase women in politics and decision making by the Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales.



L-R Cairíona Ruane MLA, Dame Rosemary Butler AM, Presiding Officer, Stephen Moutray MLA, Chairperson AERC, Antoinette Sandbach AM, Rebecca Evans AM, Paula Bradley MLA

- A blog was prepared on the visit and can be found at <http://blog.niassembly.gov.uk/2014/06/committee-visits-wales-to-explore.html>
- Issue of 'Call for Evidence' for Review of Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

## Committee Information

Number of Committee Meetings Held: 17

Number of Meetings held in public: 2

Number of meetings held in closed / part closed: 15

Reason for closed / part closed meetings: To consider the Committee's conclusions in its Report, receive legal advice and discuss sensitive information.

## Expenditure

**Assembly and Executive Review Committee**  
**Expenditure for the period 1 September 2013 – 31 August 2014**

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel - Committee Members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of visit to the National Assembly of Wales	£1198.51
Printing of committee reports	Includes the cost of Committee reports on:  The Review of Petitions of Concern	£752.77
Advertising – the cost of public notices relating to Committee inquiries, the Committee stage of Bills and meetings held outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of public notices in relation to:  Women in Politics and the NI Assembly	£474.54
Consultancy support - the cost of specialist advisers appointed by the Committee and commissioned research	Specialist adviser to the Committee	Nil
General expenses	Cost of refreshments for Committee meetings, working lunches, seminars, room hire, witness expenses, and conference fees for members.	£ 492.48
<b>TOTAL</b>		£ 2918.30